

Brilliant Barr exceeds 2016 expectations



Thomas Barr turned in one of the performances of the year when he came within a whisker of a medal at the Rio Games

Barr's brilliance lights up the The excitement was palpable and the sense of anticipation intense as crowds of excited athletics supporters crowded into The Cove on the afternoon Thursday, August 18th. The occasion of course was the final of the men's 400m hurdles at the Rio Olympics with Thomas Barr in the line-up.

An Irish athlete in an Olympic sprint final was incredible enough but an Irish athlete in with a realistic chance of a medal added to the sense of occasion.

As the athletes lined up the nervous crowd began to roar their encouragement. Less than a minute later Thomas Barr had run the race of his life but came up agonisingly short of the bronze medal by a mere five hundredths of a second.

That Barr shaved another .42 seconds of his Irish record when he clocked 47.97 was of some consolation but the agony and ecstasy of those few minutes last August were, for me at any rate, the abiding moment of the Olympics and one of the sporting moments of 2016.

While Barr kept the Déise flag flying on the athletics track, Seamus Power was certainly enjoying his Olympic experience on the golf course. Called up extremely late to the team after the defection of Rory McIlroy, Shane Lowry and Graeme McDowell, Power at one stage challenged for a medal coming down the stretch on Sunday but eventually finished in 15th, a creditable performance from the West Waterford golfer who is currently playing his first season on the PGA Tour.



Seamus Power finished in a creditable 15th at the Rio Olympics

Scott Evans created history in Rio when he became the first Irishman to win a badminton match at the Olympics. The Dubliner eventually lost in straight sets in the last 16 to Viktor Axelsen of Denmark.

Gary and Paul O'Donovan along with Annalise Murphy ensured that Team Ireland came home from Rio with silver medals although the results of our boxers proved a major disappointment.

Elsewhere Ireland's sports stars continued to compete at the highest level.

At Cheltenham Willie Mullins and Ruby Walsh were crowned leading trainer and jockey at the Cheltenham Festival for the fifth time in six years.

Mullins finished the meeting with seven wins, including Annie Power in the Champion Hurdle. It was the 10th time Walsh finished as leading rider at the meeting, in which he registered a landmark 50th Festival win, more than any other jockey riding.

At Euro '16 Ireland thrilled their hordes of travelling fans when they made it out of what had been deemed a very tough qualifying group when a goal was enough to see off Italy by a single goal to nil.

Ireland bowed out of the Championships after a 2-1 defeat to hosts France although for much of the game it looked like Ireland just might pull off another great win.

Daryl Murphy opened his international account for Ireland when his strike in the 80th minute against Serbia secured a crucial 2-2 away draw in the World Cup qualifier.

Ireland ended New Zealand's incredible winning streak in style when they defeated the All Blacks for the first time with 40-29 points win in Chicago on November 5th.

Although normal service resumed in Dublin when the All Blacks hit back with a 21-9 win, Ireland ended 2106 on high with a 27-24 points win over Australia becoming the first Northern Hemisphere team since 2003 to defeat the Springboks, the Wallabies and the All Blacks in a calendar year.